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ABSTRACT

This paper promotes discussion by native community groups of the meaning of physical and mental health, the differences between treatment and prevention, and how education contributes to disease and health of children. Education's role in disease prevention is defined as helping the learner respond appropriately to stress arising from the environment or emotional development. Such education does not seem to be available to natives. The "great learning enterprise" called for by Canada Native elders is summarized by four points: (1) the heart of the problem lies with the native community and solutions must come from those communities, (2) the future is inseparably linked to the past, (3) educating native peoples to direct their own healing and development must be a lifelong undertaking; and (4) the wellbeing of the individual is inseparable from the health of the social and cultural context from which the individual comes. A wholistic educational plan centering on the children is seen as the solution to diseases such as alcoholism and drug abuse. Activities and questions to aid in applying the information to local conditions are included. (LFL)

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The Four Worlds Development Project is the result of many people's efforts and wisdom. Some were directly involved, others inspired us through their work in education and alcohol and drug abuse prevention.

Direction for this project was set at a conference held in Lethbridge, Alberta in December, 1982. Participants at the conference were native elders, spiritual leaders and professionals of various native communities in North America. Their contributions were framed by their deep commitment to native people and their own, often hard won, experience. To each of them we offer our deepest respect and appreciation.

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Editorial note:

In English it is impossible to refer to a person without using a pronoun that indicates gender or sex (e.g. he or she, him or her, his or hers). Since there is no special word to refer to a person whose gender is not known, most writers have chosen to use the masculine form in these situations.

This custom of using the masculine form when referring to a person who is not known to be a female, has caused a conspicuous absence of reference to women in English writing.

Thus all of the great ideas and discoveries discussed in English literature are expressed in masculine terms and the reader constantly visualizes males, rather than females, as active participators in the world. Our society's tendency to devalue the role and contributions of women is only augmented by this lack of picturing women in an active creative role.

The Four Worlds Development Project has chosen to alternate the use of feminine and masculine pronouns whenever the reference is unspecific. This choice of usage is a deliberate one to avoid the the awkwardness of the compound form (he/she; him or her) while at the same time acknowledging the harmful consequences of bowing to a convention that persistently forces its audience to visualize the world as dominated by men and operating on ideas expressed in masculine terms.

Introduction

This series of discussion papers has been especially designed for small community groups; we call these "core groups". Our aim is that as people learn more about themselves and their community, they will want to get involved in creating new options, new patterns of personal and community dynamics, and in short, in promoting the ongoing process of human development in themselves and their community.

The core of anything is the heart and center of that thing. The core of a human development process is the people who, by their unity of vision, their personal commitment to growth and their leadership (by example) form the pattern around which other people cluster as positive changes take place in the community.

The Four Worlds Project promotes the development of core groups which will engage in discussion on the possibility of individual and community transformation, and conduct action-oriented research on aspects of personal and community life. It is anticipated that this group will, in some sense, establish new structural patterns around which the life of the community can organize itself--patterns that are more life-preserving, life-enhancing and development-promoting than those currently being utilized.

The core group, as it gains clarity of vision and takes action on that vision, will attract others who will also participate in the learning-transformation process. The fundamental strategic problem is not whether core groups can have such an influence. That they can is an established fact in a wide variety of case studies on social change. The challenge is twofold. The first problem is to tease out of obscurity and isolation in any community of learners those individuals who are in some way already facilitators of the organic change process in the community. The second task is to unite the hearts of these individuals in a common vision of human possibility that transcends social and political barriers to positive understanding and collaboration.

It is with the goal of helping individuals and communities face these two challenges that this discussion series was prepared. Accept them as your own and use them in whatever way you feel will be appropriate and effective.

We envision a process in which a group facilitator helps the group go through the text together, stopping frequently to discuss the points that are made. The activities and discussion questions can be used to help review what has been learned, to explore some aspects of the discussion more fully, and to apply what you have learned to your own situation and community. Much of the material can be read aloud (either by the facilitator or by various members of the

study group in turn) so that people are not limited by their reading ability in their efforts to understand the material. We anticipate that a natural outcome of this discussion process will be that the group will decide to take action in the community.

This series is just an experiment. It is not meant to be a final product. Let us know what you think, what you liked and what you didn't, and what helped you learn and what didn't. During the next year we hope to develop a set of video tapes to go with the series and maybe produce some more discussion papers to develop some of the ideas further. We need you to help us make this project a success.

AFTER the winter's cold and icy winds,
life again flows up from the bosom of Mother Earth.
And Mother Earth throws off
dead stalks and withered limbs
for they are useless.

In their place new and strong saplings arise.

Chief Dan George (Coast Salish)

In the first discussion paper we discovered how widespread the problems associated with alcohol and drug abuse are in Native communities. We read statistics that illustrated how the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health of Native people has been seriously affected by alcoholism and drug abuse. We also learned about how children suffer when their parents and other community members drink. Even the health of future generations is being weakened by today's abuse of alcohol and drugs.

Now let's see what we really mean by words like health, disease, treatment and prevention. We can begin by thinking about what it means to be at ease, because that state is opposite to the one of being diseased or dis-eased.

Ease: comfort of body or mind.

What is comfort of body or mind? Physical and mental health, certainly having a body free of aches and pains; being able to take full part in recreation and work opportunities; being rarely ill, and then only with a minor illness; being socially well-adjusted, content, relaxed, self-assured, recognized and appreciated personally and professionally; feeling acceptance of self and others; being able to resolve life's problems effectively; being balanced.

Disease/dis-ease: an alteration of a living body that impairs its functioning.

Disease is literally "dis-ease" (not at ease or the opposite of ease). Just as ease implies a functional unity between the states of body and mind, it is not possible to experience "dis-ease" without it affecting the whole person. Too much of potentially harmful substances, whether they are self-induced as in alcohol consumption, or environmentally induced as in some bacteria; or too much of potentially destructive emotions such as anger, fear and tensions, or external traumas such as physical abuse produce "dis-ease". Too little of beneficial substances such as vitamins, minerals, bodily produced anti-bodies and life-sustaining nutrients; or strengthening emotions such as love, appreciation and happiness also produce "dis-ease". To be "dis-eased" is to be diseased--to be imbalanced.

Health: sound physical or mental condition.

> [1] It is of value to think of health as that condition of the individual that makes possible the highest enjoyment of life, the greatest constructive work, and that shows itself in the best service to

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[1] William, J.F. cited in Kenneth Pelletier, Holistic Medicine: From Stress to Optimum Health, Delacorte Press, New York, 1979, p. 16

> the modern world... Health as a freedom from disease is a standard of mediocrity; health as a quality of life is a standard of inspiration and increasing achievement.
>
> [2] Health levels will be at their optimum when the environment brings out autonomous, personal, responsible, coping behavior.

In other words, health is being balanced.

Life constantly presents us with experiences. Some are of a strengthening nature. Others weaken us or have a neutral effect. These experiences affect our complete being (remember that we have four aspects: the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual). Each experience, regardless of its nature, has the ability to throw us out of balance or to create a state of "too much and/or too little". If we have developed balance, we can, with reasonable effort, re-establish the healthy state. If we have developed imbalance, it will take greater effort, perhaps more than our imbalanced being can muster, to right ourselves. We may apply inappropriate cures or artificial means in attempting to cope, such as the use of alcohol or drugs, and fall further into imbalance and thus become diseased/dis-eased.

Prior to the industrial revolution in Europe, epidemics

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[2] Illich, Ivan, cited in Pelletier as above.

and plagues were the major cause of disease and death in many parts of the world. When Europeans made contact with native people in the Americas, they brought many of their diseases with them. As the threat of infectious diseases receded because of certain medical advances, there seemed to be an equal increase in diseases which are a consequence of our way of life (the way we eat, sleep, spend our leisure time, etc.). These diseases are the result of the choices we make, both as individuals and as a society. Some examples of these types of diseases are heart disease, cancer, arthritis, respiratory illnesses, depression, alcoholism and drug addiction.

Treatment: the application of some remedy for the purpose of alleviating sickness or disease.

A patient requiring treatment is already diseased. The body and/or mind is showing symptoms of imbalance. Medical science has tended to wait for the diseased state to take hold and then focus on treating the symptoms, rather than removing underlying causes. Marvelous cures have been developed, and yet:

[3]Research focusing upon disease trends has

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[3] Pelletier, Kenneth. Ibid, p.1.

> consistently demonstrated that the quality of the environment has been the primary determinant of the general health of any population (McKeown & Record, 1962). In contrast to these environmental changes, specific medical interventions have rarely been demonstrated to be significantly related to a decline in the incidence of disease or to increased life expectancy. [A frequently cited exception is the development of antibiotics and vaccines.]

Medical science has always held out the suggestion of a magic pill, or a number of such pills, which will cure or prevent disease. Even with a disease as complex as cancer, the search is on for a cure (as well there should be). The cure, or cures, when found will not necessarily stop one from getting cancer, but will somehow control the cancer after it has taken hold. This is exactly what the term "cure" means: intervention rather than prevention.

Prevention: the act of keeping from happening or existing

The simplest solution to disease (simple in conception, not in execution) is to remove or neutralize the causes. If a cold is caused by a virus, destroy the virus before it enters the body and no cold occurs.

Contemporary diseases/dis-eases, including alcoholism and drug addiction, are caused by

> [4] ...a maladaptation to psychosocial and environmental stresses... Just as the decrease in incidence of plagues required major alterations in external environmental factors, the alleviation of these contemporary disorders requires an equally profound alteration of man's internal environment.

It has been long thought that education could be a key to producing healthy humans and preventing some diseases such as alcohol and drug abuse. Unfortunately, education efforts to the present time have largely been ineffective in this regard.

Education can Contribute to Dis-ease

Education consists of both what is taught and how it is taught. Education can only foster wholeness and balance in the developing child when educators consciously recognize the whole child and suit what is taught and how it is taught to the child, not the child to the curriculum. Unfortunately, the content and process of education often supports the needs of the system more than the individual needs of each child. As such, education has served to create disharmony or imbalance in children, or at least has failed to create or maintain balance. Failure to meet the needs of the child

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[4] Ibid

leads to dis-ease in the child. The dis-eased child may become the diseased adolescent or adult who mistakenly believes that alcohol or drugs can relieve dis-ease.

The attractiveness of a magic pill has not escaped educational thought. Recognizing, in a general way, some of the problems facing youth and the ineffectiveness of some school programs, educators have developed curriculum units which are meant to address those problems. Thus, in some school programs there may be units on alcohol and drug awareness, for example. This is a form of treatment mentality; wait for the symptoms to appear and then develop a cure to eliminate the symptoms.

Education can contribute to Health

Education can prevent dis-ease by helping the learner respond appropriately to stress arising from the environment or from his own emotional development only if education the way it is often practiced today is changed.

> [5] The ultimate mission of human intelligence is the potentiation of self. This process is not confined to the full development of human abilities. It involves in equal measure the way human beings ward off breakdown and

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[5] Ibid, p. xiii

> cope with it when it occurs. It has to do with the will to live and the physiological benefits of creativity and of the positive emotions.

If I am to be healthy, I must become a competent actor in all areas of my life (spiritual, cultural, social, economic, political, psycho-motor, cognitive, volitional and psychological) and I must learn to balance and integrate them in my own life, as well as in interaction with my family and my community. This learning is what traditional Native education was all about. From time immemorial, generation after generation of Native people were helped to learn what they needed to know in order to survive in many different and sometimes extremely difficult environments.

Today the very survival of the Native people is at stake. Entire generations have not learned, and are not learning, what they need to know in order to survive. Alcohol and drug abuse serve the superficially useful function of dulling their pain, of clouding their vision so that they need not be confronted in every dimension of their lives with the frightening truth that they have nearly forgotten how to survive in their own land.

The Elders Call for a Great Learning Enterprise

Can the Native people again learn how to survive in this land? Can they again be happy, healthy people? What are the

root causes of the disease of alcoholism and drug abuse? What can be done to remove the causes of the problem?

These were the questions faced by a group of forty native elders, spiritual leaders and professionals from across Canada who gathered at a University of Lethbridge conference held in December, 1982.

It soon became clear that the disintegrated approach generally being used in Native communities across Canada to prevent alcohol and drug abuse has never worked. It was also clear from the start that these elders knew the problem to its very core. They had lived it, suffered it, and seen their loved ones die of it. But they were not in the least discouraged by the apparent hopelessness of the situation.

They were not to be dissuaded because they saw something that those of us who have studied the problem through the lens of the medical or disease model of alcohol and drug abuse have not been able to see. They saw the essential capacity of human beings to develop: to individually and collectively re-create themselves in a new image.

The elders called for a "great learning enterprise" that would systematically educate human beings from the time they are in their mother's womb, until the time they pass out of this world. They also stressed that a two-pronged effort was needed, directed simultaneously toward the healing of

individual Native people and to the families and communities from which they come.

By involving the individual in a life-long (from conception to old age) learning process, this "great learning enterprise" will help her to develop her potential to interact creatively and productively with her environments (physical, social, economic, political, cultural, etc.)

But as well as having a personal development dimension, a comprehensive approach to dealing with the root causes of alcohol and drug abuse must have a community development dimension. Therefore, a wholistic curriculum must also provide for community learning for community development. Not only do individuals learn; human collectives such as families, groups and communities learn as well.

This education and community development enterprise would have to be solidly grounded in a Native cultural understanding of the nature and purpose of human existence, and the means of preserving and enhancing human well-being. This understanding has been expressed in the form of universal principles in Discussion Paper Two.

The Guiding Principles of the Great Learning Enterprise

The four guiding principles of this "great learning enterprise" called for by the Native elders can be summarized succinctly as follows:

....if we are going to build a truly Indian society, spirituality must be involved in everything we do, including our government.

Andrew Delisle (Mohawk)

1. The heart of the problem lies within the Native communities. The solution therefore, must come from within those same communities. Others may assist, but the Native people who will be the subjects of the healing process must direct that process themselves, in their own way.

2. The future is inseparably linked to the past. Native people must rediscover the life-preserving, life-enhancing values of their own traditional culture. They must also come to understand the debilitating historical process they have undergone as a people. They must then rise up, united in a new vision of what human beings can become, and build a new future for their children that is based solidly on the values foundation of their own culture.

3. In order for Native people to be able to become competent directors of their own healing and development process in the latter quarter of this twentieth century, able to anticipate and respond creatively to hitherto unimagined futures, a great learning enterprise is required. This learning enterprise would have to systematically educate human beings from the time they are in their

The Indians don't force anybody to do anything; they tell you the good points and it's up to you to volunteer. Nobody ever forced me to go out and fast or participate in any ceremony. I did it because I wanted to. They made me feel I should, but they didn't force me. The Indians stress the fact that you should believe in something, because if you believe in a principle, you are able to guide yourself toward that principle.

Henry Old Coyote (Crow)

mother's womb until the time they pass out of this world.

4. The well-being of the individual is inseparable from the integral health of the social and cultural context out of which that individual comes. Individual healing and the healing of the entire community must go hand in hand.

Where do we begin? The elders were very clear on this point. We must begin with the children. We must center our energies on the raising up of a generation of healthy, vigorous, creative, courageous, virtuous people who are free from the burden of alcohol and drug abuse.

A Wholistic Curriculum

In order to do this, we must develop a curriculum (i.e. an educational plan and a process) that begins by educating young girls and boys before they are parents, that places great stress on learning during pregnancy (of the parents and of the child while in the womb of its mother), and that facilitates optimum human development in the formative years. The curriculum must also transform schools into community learning centers which are actually promoting learning for human development. Not only must the school program address the students per se, it must also reach out into the

families, and into the economic and cultural life of the community. Its goal must be to promote well-being (i.e. health) in the spiritual, cultural, social, economic, political, psycho-motor, volitional, cognitive and psychological dimensions of the lives of the people it serves.

A curriculum of this kind would work on removing the roots of substance abuse through building personal competency from the earliest age. At the same time, the work with parents, expecting parents, future parents, band councils, education committees, or school boards, alcohol and drug abuse counsellors, community health representatives and other community members and groups would assure that the personal development and, when necessary, healing, of individuals throughout the community is carried out with a conscious, unified approach. The health of the individual and the health of the community are intimately connected; the more healthy individuals there are in a community, the healthier the community is as a whole, and the healthier the community, the easier it is for its members to achieve or maintain health.

At the heart of this strategy lies the conviction that human development is fundamentally a learning process. It unfolds from within a person or a people. As native people learn to respond creatively and positively from within the

framework of their own cultural system to the challenges of human development in this century, the root causes of alcohol and drug abuse will begin to disappear.

Health is the condition of optimum well-being. It has spiritual, cultural, social, economic, political, psychomotor, cognitive, volitional and psychological dimensions. But even if all is well in each of these distinct domains, they all must be balanced and integrated into the life of one person, one family, one community or one nation.

The conclusions reached by the elders and their collaborators in Lethbridge about how to address the root causes of alcohol and drug abuse in their own communities stands as eloquent testimony of the competence that the native community possesses to take charge of its own development process. Joseph Couture, formerly of the Department of Native Studies at Trent University, writes:

> [6] It is my experience that elders completely understand the nature and purpose of current community development technique. They consistently display a marked ability to compliment Western trained facilitators through the sharing of their own cultural and psycho-

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[6] Joseph Couture. "Native Training and Political Change", in Popular Analysis Popular Action: Canadian Readings in Adult Learning for Political Change. Ted Jackson & Bud Hall (eds.), International Council for Adult Education, Toronto, 1979, p. 23.

logical insights and through the exhibition of sophisticated teaching and facilitating skills.

Native communities have reached a crucial turning point in their development. They are just now awakening as if from a long period of semi-consciousness during which the roots of Native society have been seriously eroded. Today, Native people are beginning to take charge of the change processes affecting their own communities. More than ever before they are consciously directing the course of their own cultural evolution.

Native People can Contribute to the Development of all People

This development has great significance for the Native people, but it may also have great significance for all people. As the Native people become increasingly conscious and competent in directing the course of their own cultural evolution, they will become the leading edge of human change efforts on the planet. Developing peoples everywhere are watching with great interest as the drama unfolds. Many futurists believe that what the Native people are now beginning to undertake in the field of human development will one day become a central pre-occupation of the entire human race.

Questions to think about:

1. Describe the difference in the way the following two groups of people would approach the problem of alcohol and drug abuse:

    a) those who believe in treatment or intervention: once the symptoms of alcohol and drug abuse appear, they can be treated and kept under control.

    b) those who believe in prevention: once the underlying causes of alcohol and drug abuse have been removed or neutralized, health is restored.

2. What do the elders mean by the "great learning enterprise" they feel is essential to eliminating alcohol and drug abuse?

3. What is the difference between this kind of education and the educational programs (school programs, alcohol programs and other education programs) you now have in your community?

4. Why is it important that education and community development programs be solidly grounded in a Native cultural understanding of the nature and purpose of human existence?

5. Why is it important to work on the health of the whole community at the same time as working on the health of the individuals in that community?

Reading List:

1. Bloomfield, Harold H. and Robert B. Kory. The Holistic Way to Health and Happiness: A New Approach to Complete Lifetime Wellness, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1978.

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